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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problems of management and governance that developed during the course of the National Program for Educational Leadership (NPEL), an experimental four-year project that recruited and trained 62 noneducators for leadership positions in educational organizations. NPEL students were assigned to one of eight participating universities around the nation; national headquarters for the consortium was established at Ohio State University, where one of the training sites was also located. Most of the management problems that plagued the NPEL resulted directly or indirectly from the difficulty of planning and coordinating the efforts of eight autonomous and geographically distant universities. After discussing the particular management problems that became apparent during the NPEL, the author offers some suggested guidelines for avoiding such problems in future multiuniversity programs. (JG)

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PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN A MID-CAREER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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2

EA 008 120

PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Imagine, for a moment, a group of very well-intentioned and sincere individuals whose despair about the state of educational leadership preparation is all but overwhelming. Assume, also, that these individuals are primarily professors of educational administration who have spent most of their lives in and been effectively socialized by educational organizations. And suppose that conditions, such as those prevalent in the middle and late sixties in education and throughout society, had created an atmosphere of severe questioning, a questioning that pushed many to engage in a dialectic in which easy resolutions were scarce, but grand ideas attractive, because they were viewed as necessary to shake the tree of tradition.

Within this context, the primary problem confronting these social architects might have been that of institutional change: the reconstitution of the relationship between society's citizens and the institutions designed to serve them, the restructuring or revitalization of the institutions themselves, or the revision of the outcomes expected from the interactions between society and its institutions. Given this perspective, one "grand idea" which could emerge and appeal to those desiring change might have been that of revitalizing the leadership of those institutions whose legitimacy and effectiveness was in doubt.

The NPEL: An Experiment in Institutional Change

One such project, the National Program for Educational Leadership (NPEL), began in July, 1970. The primary objective of the NPEL was to recruit and train 100 non-educators for leadership positions in educational organizations. Their individualized programs (non-credit, non-degree) were to be based primarily on field experiences and last up to two years. Once selected, the Fellows were to be assigned to one of eight sites (primarily universities) where, in cooperation with a local "coordinator", they were to design their own curricula, independently pursue learning opportunities wherever located nationally, and otherwise establish sufficient credibility, with the legitimizing support of project officials, to enter into important positions in educational organizations upon completion of their training.

The NPEL was, indeed, successful. The project recruited and trained 62 Fellows[1], nearly all of whom were placed in leverage positions in various educational or education-related organizations; the Fellows have had impact upon the organizations into which they were placed; numerous agencies certified the project's graduates; several of the participating universities have changed some of the practices of their traditional programs; and other universities have adopted parts of the NPEL program.

But the NPEL should not be remembered as just another training project. Nor should its training and placement of 62 individuals, and all this implies, be the sole measure of its success. More importantly, the NPEL was a pioneering national

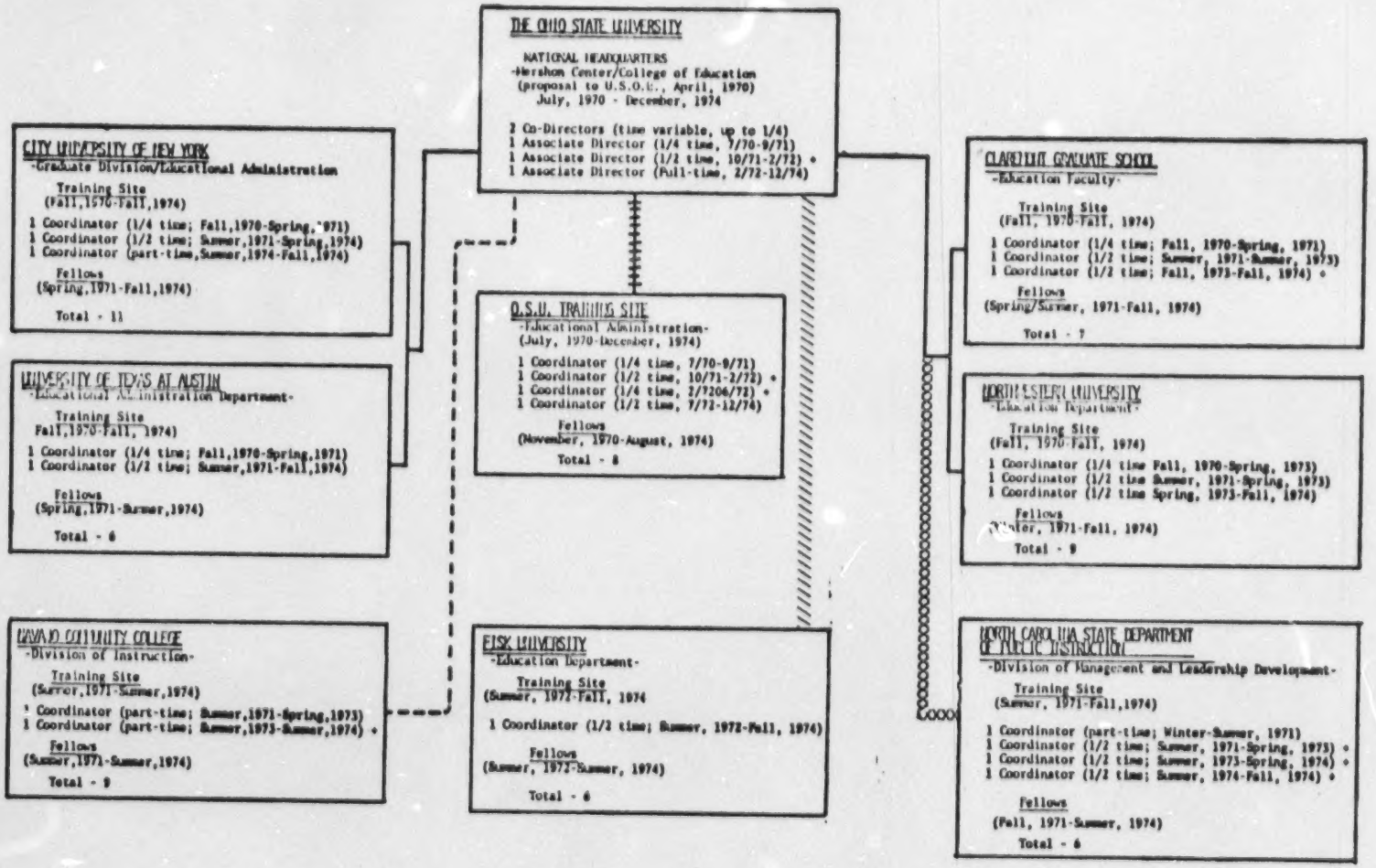
project and visionary in what it sought to do. But the project was unprepared to contend with the implications and impacts of many of its undertakings because it was often sailing in unchartered waters; others should gain from such serendipitous learnings and not unknowingly make similar, sometimes painful, mistakes.

Problems of Governance in a National Consortium

The project began with a "grand idea" for revitalizing the leadership of American education. A proposal was written which embodied this idea. It was accepted by the U. S. Office of Education because of the reputations of the proposal's authors, the congruency of the needs identified in the proposal and O.E.'s programmatic orientation, and the visionary means by which the challenge was to be addressed. Shortly after the proposal was accepted a national headquarters and training site were established at The Ohio State University, four other sites were selected from over 50 organizations which submitted letters of intent (three other training sites were added later; see Figure 1), and the recruiting process was begun, all within a few months. And therein lies part of the problem of governance: the translation of "grand ideas" into organized realities.

Most educators who have "grand ideas" which receive support have come up through the ranks in educational organizations, reputed for their resistance to translating theory into practice. These people are well-intentioned and very hopeful of changing conditions for the better. But their experience base, especially in the university, is one which generally does not include learning how

FIGURE 1: NAEL CONSORTIUM ORGANIZATIONAL CHART


THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
-Hershon Center/College of Education
(proposal to U.S.O.E., April, 1970)
July, 1970 - December, 1974
2 Co-Directors (time variable, up to 1/4)
1 Associate Director (1/4 time, 7/70-9/71)
1 Associate Director (1/2 time, 10/71-2/72) +
1 Associate Director (Full-time, 2/72-12/74)
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
-Graduate Division/Educational Administration
Training Site
(Fall,1970-Fall,1974)
1 Coordinator (1/4 time; Fall,1970-Spring,'971)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer,1971-Spring,1974)
1 Coordinator (part-time,Summer,1974-Fall,1974)
Fellows
(Spring,1971-Fall,1974)
Total - 11
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
-Educational Administration Department-
Training Site
Fall,1970-Fall, 1974)
1 Coordinator (1/4 time; Fall,1970-Spring,1971)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer,1971-Fall,1974)
Fellows
(Spring,1971-Summer,1974)
Total - 6
DAVID COMMUNITY COLLEGE
-Division of Instruction-
Training Site
(Summer,1971-Summer,1974)
1 Coordinator (part-time; Summer,1971-Spring,1973)
1 Coordinator (part-time; Summer,1973-Summer,1974) +
Fellows
(Summer,1971-Summer,1974)
Total - 9
O.S.U. TRAINING SITE
-Educational Administration-
(July, 1970-December, 1974)
1 Coordinator (1/4 time, 7/70-9/71)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time, 10/71-2/72) +
1 Coordinator (1/4 time, 2/?206/72) +
1 Coordinator (1/2 time, 7/72-12/74)
Fellows
(November, 1970-August, 1974)
Total - 8
FISK UNIVERSITY
-Education Department-
Training Site
(Summer, 1972-Fall, 1974
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer, 1972-Fall, 1974)
Fellows
(Summer, 1972-Summer, 1974)
Total - 6
CLAREMONT GRADUATE SCHOOL
-Education Faculty-
Training Site
(Fall, 1970-Fall, 1974)
1 Coordinator (1/4 time; Fall, 1970-Spring, 1971)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer, 1971-Summer, 1973)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Fall, 1973-Fall, 1974) +
Fellows
(Spring/Summer, 1971-Fall, 1974)
Total - 7
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
-Education Department-
Training Site
(Fall, 1970-Fall, 1974)
1 Coordinator (1/4 time Fall, 1970-Spring, 1973)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time Summer, 1971-Spring, 1973)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time Spring, 1973-Fall, 1974)
Fellows
Winter, 1971-Fall, 1974)
Total - 9
NORTH CAROLINA STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
-Division of Management and Leadership Development-
Training Site
(Summer, 1971-Fall,1974)
1 Coordinator (part-time; Winter-Summer, 1971)
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer, 1971-Spring, 1973) +
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer, 1973-Spring, 1974) +
1 Coordinator (1/2 time; Summer, 1974-Fall, 1974) +
Fellows
(Fall, 1971-Summer, 1974)
Total - 6
LEGEND
+ Indicates new personnel assuming position for that time period and subsequent time periods
——— Indicates initial year financial support from U.S.O.E. via "Headquarters"; in subsequent years operating funds come directly from U.S.O.E. while stipend support came from "Headquarters."
+++ Indicates was part of "Headquarters" during initial years; thereafter was an "autonomous" site through internal university budgeting arrangements
XXXXX Indicates separate funding for operating costs from the time this site joined the consortium; stipends were paid by "Headquarters."
- - - Indicates this site operated on a totally different basis from others; it was only loosely connected to the project and all of its funding, except for stipends paid by "Headquarters" in the first year, was in the form of direct grants from U.S.O.E.
//// Indicates this site was totally supported from existing funds; no new funds were provided by U.S.O.E. for the addition of this site; stipends were paid by "Headquarters."

to structure what they do so that means are explicitly related to ends. This is partly so because university professors are enculturated in practices and expectations which often differ dramatically from the world of action. Professional and organizational autonomy are highly regarded and commonly accepted definitions of accountability are viewed by most as anathematic.

In contrast to these perhaps overly dramatized and simplified generalizations about the culture of academe, the operation of any national consortium carries with it requirements for cooperation and acceptance of interdependency, shared values and goals, and agreed upon and explicitly designed strategies for achieving these. Any national consortium will also be constrained by such factors as distance, communication difficulties, the variable obligations of its personnel, especially those who are part-time, and the degree of commitment of each member organization to the consortium's values and goals. Too often, however, such matters are raised only in unrecorded and inconclusive discussions among project officials and rarely are translated into procedural guidelines that set forth clearly what is to be achieved and how progress is to be measured.

Figure 1 illustrates just how quickly the NPEL became a complex organization as it proceeded toward its primary objectives. It is obvious that the project did, by and large, translate into practice that which it sought to achieve: a national project which would recruit and train a new cadre of educational leaders. And this clearly required foresight and planning. Yet, no regularized

policy-making mechanism was ever established with the authority to examine or set goals, establish short and long-range objectives, or explicate strategies for achieving these objectives and goals. There were no processes by which progress toward the project's primary, though implicit, goal - institutional change - could be kept in view and objectives and strategies recast to improve goal realization.

Much like university committees, often ad hoc and lacking organizational memory - the same groups in which most project officials had gained their deliberative experiences - NPEL planning was ad hoc and non-cumulative when it was undertaken by all, or a "closed shop" when crises arose. That is, in inter-crisis conditions, meetings of project officials, convened to examine project problems and progress, most often involved bringing people up to date, searching yet unfocused discussions of purpose, and often serious questioning of how things got done and who made which decisions and why. Above all, these meetings generally avoided policy decisions which might affect the "home" organizations of the participants, since each had perogatives to protect.

In time of crisis, however, this form of democratic, though unfocused, deliberation was voided and the project's co-directors decided what had to be done. That this was the case clearly relieved many project officials of decisional responsibility since they knew that "tough" decisions could either be avoided by the collectivity or would be made by the co-directors. One such crisis occurred late in 1971 after the first "national" selection

process at a meeting which included Fellows and project officials. An emerging "minority caucus" and some non-minority Fellows, primarily those who had been in the program for some time, demanded a greater voice in project governance, since they mistrusted how decisions were being made. Believing that project decisions should be made openly and be open to input by all affected, the co-directors declared that project governance was "open", but that those who wished to participate must design means by which all who wished to participate could do so.

Fellow responsibility for establishing and participating in the policy-making process was on the surface a practical resolution. First, as a "live experiment", this organization building process might have provided learning opportunities for Fellows in the (re)organization and control of this nation-wide project. Second, it might have been helpful to a severely understaffed project by decreasing its organizational load and by providing a regularized policy process which so far had eluded the project's officials. Finally, the organizational process might have surfaced some ancillary learnings for the Fellows about the problems of educational organization management and leadership. This resolution did not, however, work out as anticipated. Rather, the process narrowed its focus to the micro-problems of internal politics and left unexamined the macro-problems of educational reform. The degree to which this resulted from the Fellows' frustrations with the lack of structural regularities in the project or their need to get a "handle" on something more concrete than "educational

reform" is subject to speculation. One explanation for this micro-focus may be that, as the spectre of placement began to loom for some of the Fellows, they began to apply their energies more forcefully to their individual programs, the activities over which they probably felt they could exercise maximum control; as a result, the Fellows became more concerned with internal difficulties which they may have felt impeded individual progress than with larger, "educational" issues. Many Fellows commented, at one time or another, that although it was beneficial to have colleagues, the only ones they could depend upon were themselves. Thus, while each site may have produced its own "culture" because of inter-personal proximity and the intensity of inter-personal inter-changes, no such "mechanisms" existed within the project across sites and, in the minds of most Fellows, there was no "national" project; the only one which existed concretely for a Fellow was his or her individual program activities.

While this particular crisis did not resolve itself as hoped, it did return the problem of governance to the project's officials. As might be expected, the same "committee" form of ad hoc decision-making reasserted itself until the next crisis occurred. Had a more adequate and formalized policy structure been formulated and implemented early in the project's history, some of the problems, of which the above is only an abridged example, that resulted from the interdependency of multiple "policy systems" might have been avoided and many of the problems which were singular to the NPEL project might have been anticipated and resolved before they became immobilizing.

Problems of Management in a National Consortium

Had "governance" been less problemmatic and better defined, management of the project might have been more routine. This was not the case because "doing", getting the project going and Fellows recruited and engaged in their programs, took precedence over planning and organizing. This is not to say that planning and organizing did not take place. In fact, significant planning and organizing had to occur for the structure illustrated in Figure 1 to evolve at all. Nevertheless, many Fellows thought the planning for and management of the NPEL was a disaster. As one Fellow said, "the administrators at OSU blew it."[2] While this particular comment was made by one of the early Fellows after his placement midway through the project, it accurately summarizes how many Fellows felt, not only about the "administrivia" to which this Fellow was primarily reacting, but also in terms of major project features which seemed never to come to rest long enough for one to know what to expect.

As is evident from close scrutiny of Figure 1, nine different "systems" were merged by the time Fisk University was added to the consortium in 1972. Each organization had its own internal operations and requirements. At O.S.U., for example, after the local training site was separated from the National Headquarters, two entirely different systems were in operation. Further, each site and the National Headquarters had to operate within federal guidelines; this imposed another "system", though one that was, at least, consistent for all involved.

Another inherent weakness of the NPEL management structure is evident in the allocation of staff time shown in Figure 1. Early in the program, during the main planning and organizing phase, there were only 2 1/2 full-time equivalents among the seven people who had project management responsibilities. As one of the co-directors once said, after the program had grown and the FTE's devoted to management had doubled, the project "has been operating with the equivalent FTE of a broken-down Classics Department in a university." At one stage in the project, there were about 40 Fellows dispersed across the country at nine administrative locations and about one-half a person to manage each site. With all that there was to do, there were simply too few people with too little time.

An additional factor which did not decrease the problems of management was the turnover among the "managers". During the course of the project, a total of 18 people occupied management positions at the nine sites. Only three sites had what might be called "stable" leadership in that the coordinator who began the project was still in that position when the project ended. Significant time was thus required to "educate" new position occupants to the history of the project and to help them adjust to the largely inexplicit and ambiguous policy/management structure which "guided" the project. Without explicit policy guidelines and the constant cycling of Fellows during the middle years of the program, some "managers" and Fellows may easily have been convinced that the project was more disposed toward "anarchy" than "organization".

Added to these weaknesses were: (1) the nature of the

project's program: individualized curricula that, for many Fellows, included national and international educational experiences; (2) the lack of an adequate program appraisal system early in the project; and (3) the demands of project officials' home organizations, which were clearly reinforced by the orientation of these organizations' reward systems. These pressures, the inherent weaknesses of the project's management structure, and the obscurity of its policy and policy process, all combined to lessen the total impact potential of the project.

But it was never an explicit purpose of the NPEL to construct a consortium and any learnings about the problems and prospects of such enterprises were purely accidental.[3] Given this, it is easy to determine why more attention was not given to the theoretical and practical problems of planning and organizing a training consortium. As would be expected, without, for example, clearly defined procedures or identifiable authorities, the project, after tentatively struggling to become "national", more successfully addressed its explicit objectives than those which remained largely implicit. And, since many goals remained ill-defined during the entire project, ambiguity was high and for many so troublesome that they withdrew from both the manifest and latent challenges of institutional change.

Prospects: Some Constitutive Proposals

The lessons learned by the NPEL need not be repeated by others wishing to undertake similar, nationally-oriented projects.

The attempt here has been to display briefly some of the problems which arose during the course of one, unusual project. It is hoped that others can profit from the NPEL's experiences and not have to "reinvent the wheel", especially one which may be out of round. So, below are a few prescriptions which, if heeded, may decrease the probability that others will make the same mistakes.

1. National projects, which are change-oriented and which include more than one location at which activities are to take place, must be assured, at the very least, that each cooperating organization is fully committed to the project's values and goals. Without clearly defined support, participating organizations will most likely compete with the project over, for instance, the time of assigned personnel by not releasing them from normal organizational responsibilities in a way commensurate with time obligated to project functions. This has at least two implications. First, the individual can be onerously cross-pressured. Knowing that one's primary organization "rewards" behavior which is conducive to effectively carrying out its goals, the individual is pressed to be responsive to its demands and tends to let "outside" responsibilities slip in priority. This occurs more often as a result of the transitory nature of "projects" than because of basic organizational or individual dishonesty and is reinforced by the permanence and stability inherent to a "regular" job. Second, allocating an individual's time according to arbitrary percentages suggests that differential responsibilities can be easily compartmentalized and controlled. On the contrary, especially in short term projects (1-5 years), the time demands of an individual's

non-regular functions, if they are to be addressed faithfully, are likely to be higher, more consuming, and more immediately "critical" than those of his routine, normal functions. When an individual is caught between such conflicting pressures, the probability is increased that his short-term, non-regular assignment will lose proportionately unless his primary organization consciously and explicitly arranges to eliminate such conflicts.

2. Project expectations for all participants should be clear from the beginning. Responsibilities, how they are to be performed, and the time to be spent on them need to be very explicit from the start. This is almost too obvious to be a necessary inclusion here. Yet, fuzzy expectations can only lead to inadvertent or practiced non-performance. Immobilization for all will increase as expectational inexplicitness increases. So, too, trainee (or client) frustration will increase as cross-pressures on project staff, such as those discussed above, increase. Without well-defined and agreed upon expectations, altruism will maintain one against conflicting pressures and ambiguity only so long and responsiveness to project needs and demands will suffer in time.

3. Although often necessitated by changing conditions, resulting from mistakes or opportunities, post-hoc changes in project expectations should be minimized. If changes are unavoidable, then methods must be available to clarify the need for them, address what they are to accomplish, and permit redress for those who may be adversely affected by such changes. People, and their organizations, are creatures of habit and such routinization of

expectations is hard to alter. Thus, adequate procedures must exist for project participants to unlearn old ways and adopt new ways of behaving.

4. Projects must translate their "idealism" into workable "realities." Proposals, glowing with innovation, rarely deal explicitly with how they will do what they propose, especially when the range of concerns is broad and the challenge significant. The degree to which "how to's" are left inexplicit is the degree to which the above points will be more problemmatic. Important operational features will be left unattended until crises arise. Then, it will often be too late. Procedures should be established early, and maintained throughout, for raising issues and focusing participants' attention on them, for formulating and establishing policies which are clearly articulated and relevant to those issues, and for carrying out the functions specified by such policies. Most people do not like to engage in the explication of such procedures or accept their results since this often encroaches upon their interpretation of personal or organizational autonomy and may leave them, and their organizations, open to performance assessments. More likely, however, the implementation of such an orientation requires hard work and may challenge perquisites and deeply ingrained assumptions, possibilities that few wish to face.

Just as some conflict is beneficial, some ambiguity permits flexibility, latitude and adjustment to unforeseen events. But innovators and innovations face incredible odds; the status quo does not take kindly to threats to its existence. One way to succeed,

then, is to know the "enemy" and be better organized. With clearly defined expectations and procedures, which permit participants to know what, why, and how they are doing, national consortia will be better equipped to achieve their ideals.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The project was unable to achieve its objective of 100 Fellows because funds were insufficient.

[2]Cited in Dale Lake, "Seven Interviews from the National Program for Educational Leadership: An Interpretive Summary," a report submitted to U.S.O.E., September 24, 1973, p. 8.

[3]Myron L. Puckett, "The National Program for Educational Leadership, 1970-1974: An Attempt at Institutional Innovation," a report submitted to U.S.O.E., July 15, 1975, p. 124.